

How help your student get ready for middle school

By Brandi McFerran

Caregivers play a huge role in their child's success in middle school. Parenting youth at this age may look less hands-on than in a child's earlier years, but caregivers are still one of the most important influences in their child's life.

If there's an opportunity to do so before school starts, visit the school. Many schools offer open houses where students can get their schedule and find their locker. This allows students a chance to get familiar with the layout of the school and meet staff. Many kids express some worries about finding their classrooms and not getting lost on the first day of school.

Here are more ways you can help your child transition to middle school:

- **Review the school website with your child.** School websites often post student handbooks with rules and expectations. Learn about the school's policies regarding cell phone use, electronic devices, how the school addresses bullying, attendance, dress code and incentives for completing homework and keeping up on grades. Review school programs and events and start discussion with your student about interests in clubs or sports they might be curious to try. Learn the deadlines for sports physicals, sign ups and other important dates to help your child keep track. Become familiar with how to access parent portals to check on your child's grades and attendance and how to message teachers
- **Talk about your expectations for homework and school attendance with your child.** Think about setting expectations for when homework should be done and when to limit distractions such as television or social media. Help your student create a "focus space," where they can do their homework with limited distractions. Consider helping your child practice making to-do lists of work and responsibilities and keeping track of due dates. This instills organization skills and promotes responsibility and self-confidence as academic demands increase in middle school.
- **Plan morning and afternoon routines and routes for school.** If your child walks to school or a bus stop, consider mapping out a route with your child to promote safety. Talk to them about communicating to you regarding making plans with friends, when they need to call and check in, what to do if they need to stay late after school.
- **Promote good sleep habits.** Many kids' schedules get off track in the summer months and it may take several days to help kids adjust to earlier bed times and mornings. Recommended sleep for adolescents is 9-10 hours. Help your child get the sleep they need by having them put away screens/electronics before bedtime. Practice waking up and going to bed at regular times a couple weeks before school starts.

Before and after classes begin, invite your child to talk about middle school. Ask them how they are feeling/thinking about middle school. Listen to what they are excited for and offer help with problem solving any worries. Help your child know you are there for them when they need you.

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